



socialist party graphic

## **The Socialist Party of America (1897 — 1946)**

socialist party graphic

### **1. “Founding Convention”—(city?)—June 15-XX, 1897.**

The Social Democracy in America was founded by Eugene V. Debs from the remnants of the American Railway Union and the Brotherhood of the Cooperative Commonwealth (associated with the newspaper *The Coming Nation*) on June 15, 1897. The Social Democracy of America was initially oriented towards a policy of colonization, naming a 3 member “Colonization Committee” on Aug. 1, 1897, consisting of Richard J. Hinton (Washington, DC), Wilfred P. Borland (Bay City, MI), and Cyrus Field Willard (Chicago, IL).

This trio explored the possibility of establishing a colony to seed the future “Cooperative

Commonwealth” in the Cumberland plateau of Tennessee. As an associated side-project seems to have made a concrete proposal to the city of Nashville to construct 75 miles of railroad for the city—a project which would put to work the blacklisted and unemployed former members of the ARU/Social Democracy in America to work and helped build the notion of social ownership of productive capital in a single moment, it was hoped.

The notion of building the “Cooperative Commonwealth” of the future via a model colony proved to be a matter of controversy in the organization, however. Shortly after the establishment of the organization, the group found itself bitterly divided over this strategy. In addition to the “colonizationists,” who favored concentration of their efforts on building a model economic unit and gaining the achievement of socialism through the power of example there emerged a “political action wing,” which sought to achieve socialism through political organization and the electoral process.

### **Conventions of the Social Democratic Party of America**

The political action wing of the Social Democracy in America bolted that group's 2nd Convention and held their own gathering in June 1898; there they established themselves as the Social Democratic Party of America. Since the gathering was held by a bolting faction of a Convention formally called by the Social Democracy of America, subsequent party histories do not regard this first organizational meeting as a formal “Convention”—although the party organ established at the same time, *The Social Democratic Herald*, did consider it such.

### **1. “Organizational Convention”—Chicago, IL—June XX-XX, 1898.**

At the second Convention of the Social Democracy in America (June 1898), attended by 70 delegates representing 94 branches, the colonizationists won the day with regards to the group's program, prompting the political action wing to leave the party. Thirty-three delegates bolted the Second Convention and held a meeting establishing themselves as the Social Democratic Party of America. They issued their organizational platform in the form of a **"Statement of Principles"** on June 11, 1898. In this document, the group categorized socialism as "the collective ownership of the means of production for the common good and welfare" and called upon "the wage-workers and all those in sympathy with their historical mission to realize a higher civilization" to sever ties with existing conservative capitalist and reformist political parties and to instead work for "the establishment of a system of cooperative production and distribution."

## 2. "1st National Convention"—Indianapolis, IN—March 6-9, 1900.

At the time of its first formal convention in March of 1900, the fledgling SDP claimed more than 4500 members in 226 branches in 25 states—being particularly strong in the state of Massachusetts, where it elected one mayor and sent two SDP members to the state legislature.

The so-called "First National Convention" was held at Reichwein's Hall, Indianapolis, Indiana. The gathering was attended by **60 delegates representing 17 states**. The convention was opened with a singing of the songs "Hark! The Battle Cry is Ringing" and the "Marseillaise."

The convention re-elected A.S. Edwards of Chicago editor of the Social-Democratic Herald. It was noted that the paper's circulation has grown from 3,000 to 8,000 copies per week. The party itself had grown by about 1,000 in the first 9 weeks of 1900, standing at "about 4,500 dues-paying members" at the time of the convention, according to the report of the proceedings.

The Indianapolis Convention was attended by representatives of the breakaway "Right" faction of the Socialist Labor Party, headed by Morris Hillquit and Algernon Lee. The convention agreed to pursue unity with the SLP Right and entrusted a committee to work out the details of the union. The committee named did not fulfill the will of the convention, however, and the SDP came to the verge of a split, with two parallel organizations established—anti-unionists and pro-unionists working with the SLP Right. These two tendencies were not brought together until the Socialist Unity Convention of July 1901.

## Convention of the so-called "Kangaroo" Faction of the Socialist Labor Party of America

In 1899 a great faction fight erupted in the ranks of the Socialist Labor Party, pitting a Right Wing against Daniel DeLeon and his allies in control of the party apparatus. The SLP Right (perjoratively called "Kangaroos" by their political opponents) fought bitterly for control of the SLP over the issues of dual unionism (the DeLeonists

sought to establish socialist unions in all industries to compete with the conservative unions of the AF of L) and centralized control of the party press (the DeLeonists sought to bring all party press organs under the direct control of the party's Central Executive Committee).

1. [so-called] “10th Convention of the SLP”—Rochester, NY—January 27 - February 2, 1900.

Not to be confused with the “regular” 10th Convention of the SLP, which was held in NYC from June 2-8, 1900. A stenographic report was kept of the one Convention of the “Rochester SLP.” The DeLeonist SLP regulars held their own 10th Convention of the Socialist Labor Party later in 1900, for which a stenographic report also exists.



*socialist party graphic*

### Conventions of the Socialist Party of America

Regular Conventions of the SPA were subsequently held every four years so that the party could handle the business of choosing its nominee for President and Vice President of the United States in addition to engaging in the usual programmatic debates.

Unlike the Socialist Labor Party, the Socialist Party did not generally “number” its conventions until the 1930s, instead referring to them by year.

Stenographic reports were published for the first 6 Conventions of the SPA, including the St. Louis gathering. As a cost-cutting measure, no

stenographic records were kept after 1917—simple meeting minutes were taken instead.



**Delegates to the 1901 Indianapolis Socialist Unity Convention**

*socialist party graphic*

1. “Socialist Unity Convention”—Indianapolis, IN— July 29 - Aug. XX, 1901.

The “Socialist Unity Convention” of 1901 brought together the anti-unionist faction of the Social Democratic Party headed by

Eugene V. Debs and Victor Berger and the New York-based “Kangaroo” faction of the SLP and their unionist SDP allies, a group which included Morris Hillquit, Job Harriman, and Algernon Lee.

Party headquarters were established in St. Louis, MO, which was selected over Chicago by a vote of 3,517 to 3,096 at the Indianapolis Convention. Day to day operations were conducted by a "Local Quorum" of five party members living in the St. Louis area.

Annual Meeting of the National Committee—St. Louis—Jan. 29 - Jan. 31, 1903.

Report in *Appeal to Reason* no. 376 by Ricker.

The January 1903 plenum of the National Committee was one of the seminal events in the history of the early Socialist Party. The St. Louis "Local Quorum," which conducted the day-to-day operations of the organization, was firmly in favor of a policy of collaboration with other working class political organizations during campaigns ("fusionism")—activity which provided a pretext for the NC at the January 1903 meeting to move party headquarters from St. Louis to Omaha, Nebraska, in the process thus deposing the St. Louis "Local Quorum."

The January plenum **adopted a set of four resolutions**, including a strict "Anti-Fusion" resolution which called for the expulsion of any state Socialist organization which participated in fusion activities or allowed its locals to participate in fusion activities.

The 1903 plenum also established the principle of non-interference between economic (trade union) and political (SPA) arms of the American working class movement, vowing non-intervention in union affairs and maintaining strict separation of unions from the party's national conventions.

As of Jan. 1, 1903, there were 32 state and national organizations affiliated with the SPA. During the first half of 1903, additional charters were granted to Alabama, Arkansas, and Vermont, and Oklahoma was declared in good standing in March, when dues for 10 locals from the state were paid in dating back to the first of the year.

2. "1904 National Convention"—Chicago, IL—May 1 - 6, 1904.

The 1904 Convention of the Socialist Party of America was attended by **175 delegates representing 33 states** and territories.

3. "1908 National Convention"—Chicago, IL—May 10 - 17, 1908.

The 1908 Convention of the Socialist Party of America was attended by **216 delegates representing 46 states** .

#### **4. “National Congress”—Chicago, IL—May 15 - 21, 1910.**

The so-called “National Congress” of 1910 was intended as a programatic meeting which was not to be distracted by the Presidential nomination process. It differed in no other fundamental respect from the “Conventions” of 1904-1912. The gathering was attended by **125 delegates, representing 44 state organizations** and 9 of the Socialist Party's foreign language affiliates.

#### **Conference of Socialist Officials—Milwaukee, WI—Aug. 19-21, 1911.**

A gathering of Socialist Party elected officials from around the country was held in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, beginning Saturday, Aug. 19, 1911. Thirty elected officials participated at the gathering, which was held at the same time as meetings of the National Executive Committee and the National Women's Committee. Participants of all three meetings merged periodically. Papers were delivered to the Conference of Officials by C.B. Whitnall, City Treasurer of Milwaukee, on the work on “city planning” that had been done in that city; Carl D. Thompson told about the problems faced in the struggle for more equitable distribution of the tax burden. The work of the Milwaukee health department and paving department were also detailed, so that Socialist officials might learn from Milwaukee's experience in the event that they held the reins to power.

#### **5. “1912 National Convention”—Indianapolis, IN—May 12 - 18, 1912.**

The Indianapolis Convention of 1912 proved to be the largest party gathering ever held by the SPA. It was attended by **287 voting delegates and 8 non-voting delegates**, representing 47 states plus the District of Columbia and 7 of the party's foreign language groups.

In the aftermath of the 1912 National Convention, the party was governed by annual meetings of the National Committee, which itself elected the five member National Executive Committee in place of membership referendum. The 1913 and 1914 National Committee meetings were dominated by the center-right faction that retained majority control of the 1912 convention.

#### **Meeting of the NEC—Chicago, IL (?)—Sept. 19-21, 1914**

The September 1914 plenum of the NEC spent a full day dealing with the factional war in the Finnish Federation. After hearing representatives of both sides, It ordered the Federation not to expel members of the minority left faction from the party for reading, subscribing to, or financially supporting the publication *Sosialisti*, a Duluth, MN newspaper started in response to the constructive socialist majority of the Federation gaining editorial control over the Middle District's organ, *Työmies*. Members already expelled for this offense were to be reinstated. According to a special English-language edition of *Sosialisti* published in January 1915, this directive to reinstate expelled members of the faction was ignored by the right wing executive body of the Finnish Federation. A subcommittee consisting of Victor Berger, James Maurer, and Adolph Germer was appointed to attend the forthcoming emergency convention of the Finnish Federation (Berger and Germer were unable to attend and were replaced by Walter Lanfersiek and Oscar Ameringer). In addition to attending the Finnish convention, the subcommittee held another fact-finding meeting, attended by seven representatives of each faction. A report was made to the next regular meeting of the NEC, held in December 1914.

#### **Meeting of the NEC—Chicago, IL (?)—Dec. 12-13, 1914**

The December 1914 plenum of the NEC revisited the controversy in the Finnish Federation. The meeting passed a resolution which gave an unequivocal green light to the constructive socialist leadership or the Finnish Federation to purge its ranks of the revolutionary socialist “disrupters” behind the Duluth newspaper *Sosialisti*, resolving that “the decision of the Finnish Federation as to expulsion of locals or members shall be accepted by state, county, and local organizations as final.”

#### **Annual Meeting of the National Committee—Chicago—May 10 - XX, 1915.**

A turning point came with the 1915 National Committee meeting held in Chicago—with a strong left majority group dominating the gathering. The 1915 National Committee meeting made provision for a return of the election of National Officials to the party membership and language inserted into the party constitution prohibiting the National Office from intervening in state controversies.

In 1916 no Presidential nominating convention was held—Eugene V. Debs chose not to run for President and anti-war activist Allan Benson was selected as the nominee of the SPA by a referendum of its members.

#### **Meeting of the NEC—Chicago, IL—January 6-7, 1917**

The January 6-7, 1917 plenum of the National Executive Committee received a lengthy [report on the state of the organization](#) from Executive Secretary Adolph

Germer. Germer noted that the party's vote in the recent 1916 Presidential campaign fell short of the 1912 tally, which he attributed, among other reasons, to "the general apathy that has prevailed in the party for the past three or four years and from which we have only in a measure recovered." Germer noted that the party's membership had fallen from a peak of 118,000 in 1912 to just over 83,000 for the first 11 months of 1916—a slight increase over the previous year but "far from satisfactory in view of the campaign activities." The party had an \$8,800 deficit remaining from the 1916 campaign. Finances were tight and the party was in arrears to the tune of over \$1200 for dues to the International. Germer remained upbeat, however, noting "In spite of our failure to roll up the vote that we so earnestly worked for and confidentially expected, there is no cause whatever for discouragement."

#### Meeting of the NEC—Chicago, IL—March 10-11, 1917

The National Executive Committee of the SPA met in Chicago over the weekend of March 10-11, 1917. War seemed imminent and [a referendum](#) calling for a special Emergency Convention in September had just been certified as having been properly seconded and mailed to the membership for a vote (Resolution "A" 1917). In view of the speed of the approaching crisis, the NEC decided to set aside the organization's constitutional procedures and issue a call for a convention to be held April 7 in a city to be named later (see [meeting minutes](#)). Input was sought from the members of the National Committee, who [responded by wire](#)—overwhelmingly in favor of an immediate Emergency Convention. As in accord with "Referendum A," 200 delegates were apportioned to the various states according to average paid membership for 1916, and instructions were issued to the State Secretaries for the immediate election of delegates. Due to a lack of available space in Chicago on such short notice, St. Louis was decided upon as the site for the extraordinary convention.

#### 6. "1917 National Emergency Convention"—St. Louis, MO—April 7-14, 1917.

The "Emergency National Convention" of 1917 was called by the National Executive Committee for April when it became clear that the membership referendum for an Emergency Convention to consider the position of the SPA on the European War would pass. The date of the Emergency Convention in the referendum was set for Sept. 1917; the NEC rushed the timetable for an Convention so that a more timely gathering could be held.

Nearly [200 voting delegates and representatives of the 8 foreign language federations](#) of the Socialist Party and Young Peoples Socialist League assembled in St. Louis in the immediate aftermath of American entry into the Great European War. The convention chairman was Morris Hillquit, who delivered the keynote address, a strenuous anti-militarist appeal, noting that "War means reaction at home. War creates a mob spirit of unreason. War creates conditions under which all the powers of reaction, all the predatory powers of the country, can satisfy their desires, and accomlishe their attacks upon popular liberty, upon popular rights with impunity.... This convention, comrades, will make or unmake the Socialist movement in the United States."

A strong majority of the Emergency Convention (141 of 200 delegates) voted in favor of an aggressive manifesto against American entry into the European war later known to posterity as the St. Louis Resolution. This majority report of the War and Militarism Committee (authored by a subcommittee consisting of Morris Hillquit, C.E. Ruthenberg, and Algernon Lee) stated in no uncertain terms that “our entrance into the European war was instigated by the predatory capitalists in the United States.” The war was one for crass profit, the resolution stated, since democracy could not be imposed nor could militarism be eliminated by force of arms. “We brand the declaration of war by our government as a crime against the people of the United States and against the nations of the world,” stated the resolution, and “continuous, active, and public opposition to the war” and “vigorous resistance to all reactionary measures” were promised.

A minority of the convention signed and forwarded to referendum vote an alternative manifesto and program. This so-called Minority Report recognized American participation in the war as an established fact and demanded the “conscription of wealth,” preservation of civil rights, and the nationalization of monopolies, and the establishment of contact between the SPA with the socialist parties of “enemy” countries so that peace might be reestablished “on democratic terms” at the soonest possible moment. The [ballot containing both reports](#) went out to the membership on May 5, 1917 and was submitted to Local Secretaries by June 24, with final voting submitted to the National Office by Independence Day, the 4th of July. The St. Louis Resolution easily carried over the Minority Resolution in a vote of Socialist Party members, tallying a win by a margin of 22,345 to 2,752.

Incidentally, the American government's chief tool of repression, the so-called Espionage Act, went into effect on June 15, 1917—that is, before the St. Louis Resolution was formally ratified by the SPA.

A segment of the SPA's Right Wing quit the party over the organization's militant opposition to the war and attempted to form a new third party, joining forces with Prohibitionists, Single-Taxers, and the Left Wing of the Bull Moose Progressive Party in the cause. At a convention held October 3-4, 1917, the [National Party](#) was established. A revised [platform and constitution](#) for the group was approved at a second convention held in March of 1918. This social-patriotic social democratic party did not long survive the war, however, expiring shortly after the November Congressional elections of 1918.

**Meeting of the NEC --- Chicago, IL --- May 24-30, 1919.**

The May 24-30 meeting of the National Executive Committee in Chicago was one of the landmark events in the history of the Socialist Party. On Saturday, May 24, the NEC voted 7-3 to expel the entire Socialist Party of Michigan from the party due to a newly-approved clause in the Michigan which called for the expulsion of any member who engaged in or advocated political action—a clause which stood at fundamental odds with the constitution of the SPA. Following this, heated debate began regarding a suspension of seven of the party's language federations amidst allegations of election fraud and advocacy of the manifesto of the Left Wing Section. The

Hungarian, Latvian, Lithuanian, Polish, Russian, South Slavic, and Ukrainian Federations—with 30,000 members in all—were suspended forthwith. In a related motion, the Translator-Secretaries were thrown out of the national headquarters building without notice.

#### Conference of the Left Wing Section—New York—June 21-24, 1919.

The Conference of the Left Wing Section was organized on short notice, [the call for the conference](#) only appearing in the Left press around the first of June 1919. The call was made jointly by Local Boston, SP (Louis Fraina, Sec.), Local Cleveland, SP (C.E. Ruthenberg, Sec.), and the Left Wing Section of Greater New York (Maximilian Cohen, Sec.). Cohen acted as the coordinating secretary for organization of the event. Basis of representation was one delegate for every 500 members, with no group to name more than four delegates. Each local or Left Wing minority fraction of a local was entitled to one delegate. Delegates were to be taxed \$25 each for a central fund, with these funds divided to pay the expenses of participants.

The Conference began Saturday, June 21 and ran through Monday, June 24, 1919 in New York City. The Conference was attended by approximately 90 delegates from 20 different states, predominantly from the Northeast, Midwest, and Upper Midwest. This Conference did not adopt a formal program but did elect a 9 member National Council, consisting of John Ballam, Maxmilian Cohen, I.E. Ferguson, Louis C. Fraina, Benjamin Gitlow, James Larkin, Eadmonn MacAlpine, C.E. Ruthenberg, and Bertram Wolfe. The National Council was delegated the task of continuing the work of the Conference in drafting a program, and the resulting Manifesto of the Left Wing was published in the July 5, 1919, issue of *The Revolutionary Age*.

New York City resident Maximilian Cohen served as Secretary of the Left Wing National Council. At the first meeting of the National Council, Fraina was elected Editor of *The Revolutionary Age* and MacAlpine Managing Editor. Both immediately resigned from membership on the National Council, leaving seven members on this governing body.

#### 7. “1919 National Emergency Convention”—Chicago, IL —August 30 - September 5, 1919.

The 1919 Emergency Convention was convened in response to pressure from the organized Left Wing Section of the SPA; the Left Wing originally sought the Convention to solidify the SPA's position towards the socialist revolution in Russia. Instead, the gathering wound up being the nexus of the great show-down between the party regulars, headed by National Executive Secretary Adolph Germer and New York State Executive Secretary Julius Geber, and the Left Wing Section, headed by Alfred Wagenknecht and L.E. Katterfeld. The Left Wing Section of the Socialist Party left to form the Communist Labor Party.

A list of [117 credentialed delegates from 22 states](#) was published in the press, of whom 31 are said to have thrown in their lot with the Communist Labor Party. During the bitter (and basically lawless) credentials process controlled by the Germer clique, entire state delegations were excluded (California, Ohio); other artificially inflated delegations from hastily reorganized states were seated in full (Michigan, Massachusetts).

At the 1919 Emergency Convention the SPA's Constitution was changed. Henceforth the Constitution mandated that annual National Conventions be held. These annual events continued throughout the decade of the 1920s before being again lessened in frequency due to their great expense to the organization.

#### **8. “1920 National Convention”—New York City—May 8 - 14, 1920.**

The 1920 National Convention of the Socialist Party was held at New York City in Finnish Hall, located at 5th Ave. and 127th St. The meeting pitted a remaining radical faction based in the Illinois delegation, featuring William F. Kruse and J. Louis Engdahl, against a Center-Right bloc, including Morris Hillquit, Algernon Lee, Jacob Panken, James Oneal, Meyer London, and Cameron King. [A list of over 160 delegates and alternates](#) was published.

The first test of strength took place the first day, when Morris Hillquit was elected Chairman for the day over J. Louis Engdahl by a vote of 91 to 29. The body approved a very mild Declaration of Principles prepared ahead of the convention, refusing an appeal by the Left to refer the document to committee for additional amendment.

A heated issue swirled around the defense of the five Socialist Party Assemblymen expelled from the New York state legislature, which was conducted on a basis deemed to be strictly patriotic and limited to appeals to bourgeois legality, according to the left. William Kruse was allowed only a short time on the floor to make his case before Meyer London was recognized by Vice Chairman of the Day Dawidow of Michigan. London spoke against the measure and simultaneously (contrary to parliamentary procedure) made a motion to shut off debate. The chair repeatedly refused to recognize Benjamin Glassberg, who sought to read the exact pages of the proceedings of the Albany trial which brought offense. Instead a motion to table the resolution and expunge record of the debate from the minutes was recognized and passed by the gathering.

The convention voted to work towards formation of a new International containing “all true Socialists of the world” while attempted to gain a seat in the Third International in Moscow by a vote of 90-40, the minority seeking the more radical alternative of affiliation with the Third International without an attempt to draw other center-left organizations into affiliation.

The 1920 Convention passed the majority version of the Platform by a vote of 103-33. It also nominated Eugene V. Debs, serving a ten year sentence in federal prison in Atlanta for speaking out against the war, its candidate for President and nominated Chicago attorney Seymour Stedman its candidate for Vice President.

Immediately after the close of the 1920 National Convention, a “Committee for the Third International” was organized inside the Socialist Party, with J. Louis Engdahl chosen as the group's secretary.

The National Executive Committee met in Pittsburgh, PA, on Aug. 21-23, 1920. The committee adopted a motion by James Oneal to defer consideration of the question of international affiliation until such time that the NEC had a definite proposal to consider—a delaying tactic intended to defer the SPA's referendum decision to affiliate with the Communist International with conditions.

9. “1921 National Convention”—Detroit, MI—June 25 - 29, 1921.

The 1921 Detroit Convention of the Socialist Party was attended by [39 delegates, representing 22 states, and 6 fraternal delegates](#)

If the preceding convention had been focused on the question of international affiliation of the Socialist Party, the 1921 Convention was focused on another matter—the reaction of the party establishment to Left Wing elements still inside the SPA. Frontman in this offensive against the Left Wing was National Executive Secretary Otto Branstetter, who put forward a resolution making the support or endorsement of the Third (Communist) International grounds for immediate expulsion, with the NEC directed to enforce this decision. This was bitterly opposed by the “Committee for the Third International,” headed by J. Louis Engdahl, County Secretary of Local Cook County (Chicago) and editor of *The Chicago Socialist*.

The 1921 Convention raised party membership dues to 50 cents per month, of which the National Office was to receive 10 cents, the state organization 15 cents, the county or city organization 10 cents, and the local or branch office 15 cents.

The convention voted 37 to 2 to instruct the incoming National Executive Committee to “make a careful survey of all radical and labor organizations in the country, with a view to ascertaining their strength, disposition and readiness to cooperate with the Socialist movement upon a platform not inconsistent with that of the party.” This resolution of the convention would later be used as justification for direct participation in the [Conference for Progressive Political Action](#).

In February 1922 a new consolidated district of the SPA was created—the “Mountain States Organization District,” comprised of the states of Idaho, Wyoming, Colorado, Utah, Nevada, Arizona, and New Mexico. O.A. Kennedy, previously State Secretary of Utah, was appointed to serve as State Secretary for each of the states in the district.

10. “1922 National Convention”—Cleveland, OH—April 29 - May 2, 1922.

The 1922 Convention was attended by 22 delegates representing 17 states as well as 6 fraternal delegates representing the five language groups and the YPSL. The

gathering was observed by Workers Party Executive Secretary C.E. Ruthenberg, newly released from Sing Sing Prison, who [wrote about](#) the “portly, gray-haired men with a look of petty-bourgeois prosperity about them” for the Communist press.

The first day's discussion dealt with international affiliation. Three proposals were made: to continue the decision of the 1921 Convention not to affiliate with any International Socialist organization; a second to send delegates to the next conference of the “Two-and-a-Half” International and for these delegates to return to make recommendations; and a third calling for immediate affiliation with the “Two-and-a-Half” International. By a vote of 11 to 9, with one vote for non-affiliation, the convention voted to immediately affiliate with the Vienna group.

The Committee on Appeals was eliminated from the [Constitution of the Party](#) at the 1922 convention.

A 1922 Congressional Program was not acted upon by the Convention, but was referred to the National Executive Committee.

The National Executive Committee met in Cleveland on Dec. 9-10, 1922, in conjunction with the 2nd Conference of the [Conference for Progressive Political Action](#), held in that city from Dec. 11-12. The meeting discussed the state of the organization, noting an 11 month average membership for the group in 1922 of 11,223, the Russian Relief Fund, Party finances, and other matters. With regards to Russian Relief, as the SP was unable to distribute its relief directly, it terminated its fundraising effort at the \$6,450 mark and signed over its unremitted balance to the American Friends Service Committee of Philadelphia. The SPA pointedly ignored the fundraising efforts of the Communist Party's [Friends of Soviet Russia](#) mass organization.

The National Executive Committee met in New York on Feb. 24-25, 1923. The group received a report from its representative at the Convention of the Young People's Socialist League and was occupied with organizational and financial matters. A forthcoming Congress of the Socialist and Labor International was noted, to be held May 21, 1923, but the NEC determined that it was unable to send a delegate due to financial considerations—but that the elected representatives of the party, Morris Hillquit and Victor Berger, would nonetheless be attending the gathering at their own expense.

#### 11. “1923 National Convention”—New York—May 19 - 22, 1923.

The 1923 convention was attended by Eugene Debs—one of his very rare appearances at these gatherings of the party faithful. He did not speak to the body.

The National Executive Committee met in St. Louis, MO, at the Hotel Majestic on Feb. 9-12, 1924. This meeting was held in conjunction with the 3rd Conference of the CPPA, also taking place in St. Louis on Feb. 11-12. The gathering received the Feb. 1, 1924, resignation of Otto Branstetter as Executive Secretary, who called himself "tired and worn out," and named Assistant Executive Secretary Bertha Hale White as Executive Secretary of the party. The body discussed the proposed St. Paul Convention of the Farmer-Labor Party but took no formal action on the matter; it also discussed the Conference for Progressive Political Action. The majority of the NEC resolved that the Socialist Party should enter a Labor Party if one should be formed, with it understood that the organization would retain its own group identity within the new political association.

## 12. "1924 National Convention"—Cleveland—July 6 - 8, 1924.

The 1924 Convention of the Socialist Party was held in Cleveland immediately after the closing of the First Convention of the [Conference for Progressive Political Action](#) in that city. It was attended by [157 delegates and alternates](#). The gathering voted 115 to 17 in favor of a report on the CPPA that endorsed the candidacy of Robert M. LaFollette for President and instructed the party officials to cooperate with the CPPA in the upcoming campaign, to seek increased SP representation on the National Committee of the CPPA, and to send a full representation to the CPPA's 2nd Convention and instructing these delegates "to vote and work for the formation of a party composed of economic organizations of labor, working farmers, the Socialist party, and other advanced groups; to be separate and distinct from and opposed to the Republican, Democratic, and other capitalist parties..."

The 1924 Convention also adopted a new Declaration of Principles.

After this date, conventions of the Socialist Party were to be held biannually, although a "Special Convention" was convened in 1925.

The National Executive Committee met in Washington, DC, on Dec. 13, 1924. The meeting was held in the aftermath of the National Committee plenum of the Conference for Progressive Political Action, which took place on Dec. 12. The gathering discussed a plan to retire the indebtedness of the party's National Office and the forthcoming Second Convention of the CPPA, which was slated to begin in Chicago on Feb. 21, 1925. On a motion of Morris Hillquit, a Special Convention of the Socialist Party was called to meet in Chicago on Feb. 21, 1925, as well. Eugene V. Debs, Morris Hillquit, and SP Executive Secretary Bertha Hale White were elected as the three delegates of the SP National organization to the CPPA conclave.

## 13. "Special Convention"—Chicago—Feb. 23 - 25, 1925.

#### **14. "1926 National Convention"—Pittsburgh—May 1 -3, 1926.**

**A mimeographed report of the convention proceedings was published.**

#### **15. "1928 National Convention"—New York—April 13-17, 1928.**

**The 1928 National Convention of the Socialist Party unanimously nominated Norman Thomas as its candidate for President of the United States and James Maurer its candidate for Vice President.**

**The body approved changes to the party constitution, including one that removed reference to the words "class struggle" from the membership application, another which set party dues at \$1 per year unless state organizations fixed them otherwise, and a third which returned the party to a schedule of holding regular national conventions only during presidential campaign years. These changes were sent to the membership of the party by referendum and were approved.**

#### **The Faction Fight of the 1930s—"Militants" and "Progressives" vs. "Old Guard"**

**Beginning in 1930, a long-running faction fight began to develop in the Socialist Party, pitting relative newcomers to the party, anxious to achieve "Socialism in Our Time," against the organization's aging veteran cadres. In the words of historian Bernard Johnpoll, this was "more a struggle between generations than between ideologies. The ideological content of the struggle did not develop until the disagreement was almost two years old..." Basic differences between the two groupings were more over the question of tactics than principles, with the Militants seeking organized Socialist caucuses in the ranks of the trade union movement while the Old Guard adamantly defended the historic separation between the political and economic arms of the workers' movement. The Militants sought to make a primary appeal to the intelligentsia and middle classes, believing that the working class would tend to follow the lead of the more educated citizenry, while the Old Guard held a more traditional perspective basing itself on the primacy of the working class. As Johnpoll notes, "the adherents of the Old Guard were, if anything, more Marxist than the militants." The perspective on the Soviet Union further divided the two factions, with the Militants tending to be more supportive of the Soviet Union during this violent period of Mass Collectivization and the First Five Year Plan than were the more democratically-oriented Old Guard.**

**On another level, the fight between Militants and Old Guard was a battle of personalities, pitting Norman Thomas (doyen of the Militants) against Morris Hillquit and his cohort of party leaders who cut their political eye-teeth during the first two decades of the 20th Century.**

**Neither of these factions were monolithic or particularly well organized, differing within themselves on matters of theory and practice. As Johnpoll notes, some of the**

**Militants wanted the SP to move away from Marxist rhetoric and to appeal to the American people as exploited consumers rather than producers, while others within the faction wanted to turn the organization into a more revolutionary Marxist organization. In Johnpoll's estimation, the ideological split between the two main SP factions of the 1930s was one between "aggressive Social Gospel progressivism" (Militants) vs. "lethargic Marxism" (Old Guard).**

[fn. Bernard Johnpoll: *Pacifist's Progress: Norman Thomas and the Decline of American Socialism*. (Chicago: Quadrangle, 1970), pp. 77-86.]

**Historian David Shannon depicts the division within the Socialist Party as a three-way split, with the anti-Old Guard faction split between a boisterous but numerically small Marxist "Militant" group and a group of "radical non-Marxists" which he categorizes as the "Progressives." As with Johnpoll, Shannon sees the Old Guard as a group of superannuated evolutionary Marxists, containing both "men of great ability" such as Hillquit, Lee, and O Neal, and others who "occupied positions of importance for which only their length of party service qualified them." The Old Guard was strongest in the states of Pennsylvania, New York, and Connecticut, Shannon noted, adding that it additionally controlled most of the state committees and offices.**

[fn. David A. Shannon: *The Socialist Party of America: A History*. (New York: Macmillan, 1955), pg. 211.]



*socialist party graphic*

**16. "17th National Convention"—Milwaukee, WI—May 21 - 24, 1932.**

**Some 223 delegates were elected to the 17th National Convention of the Socilaist Party of America, held at the Municipal Auditorium in Milwaukee, Winconsin. Sixty-seven alternates were also chosen, as well as fraternal delegates from the**

**Czechoslovak, Finnish, Italian, Jewish, Yugoslav (Slovenian), Lithuanian, and Polish Language Federations of the party. The [published list of elected delegates and alternates](#) appears here.**

**The gathering was preceded by a plenum of the National Executive Committee on May 19 at the New Randolph Hotel in Milwaukee. The nex day featured an "Organizational Conference" of the NEC, also held at the New Randolph Hotel, a gathering which was addressed by Julius Gerber of New York, William W. Busick of Los Angeles, and Leo Krzycki of Milwaukee on the "Problems of Organization in Large Cities." The afternoon session was dedicated to "Small Town and Rural Problems," featuring reports by Jasper McLevy of Bridgeport, CT; David George of Hopewell, VA; and Amicus Most of Charleston, WV.**

**The formal convention started on Saturday, May 21, with National Secretary Clarence Senior chairing the session and Mayor Daniel W. Hoan of Milwaukee speaking to**

**welcome the delegates. A mimeographed report of the convention minutes and resolutions was published.**

**17. "18th National Convention"—Detroit, MI—June 1 - 3, 1934.**

**A typeset report of the convention minutes and resolutions was published. The convention decided to revise the party's constitution to provide that national conventions be held every two years.**

**The 1934 Convention, after bitter debate, approved a new Declaration of Principles that was in tune with the line advocated by the Revolutionary Policy Committee. The party's Old Guard, concentrated in the New York State organization and the Jewish and Finnish language federations, fought a bitter campaign to have this declaration defeated by the party in a referendum vote. The Declaration ultimately passed by a vote of 5,995 to 4,872, with 10,087 members not voting. In response to this, the entire Socialist Party of Oregon found it necessary to disaffiliate with the national SP to avoid being embroiled in the state's "Criminal Syndicalism" law, and the Old Guard began preparations for a final split of the organization.**

**18. "19th National Convention"—Cleveland, OH—May 23 - 26, 1936.**

**A mimeographed report of the convention minutes and resolutions was published.**

**19. "Special National Convention"—Chicago, IL—March 26 - 29, 1937.**

**A mimeographed report of the convention minutes and resolutions was published. This was an emergency gathering held only 10 months after the close of the regular 19th Convention of the party. The gathering was ostensibly called to reorganize the structure of the party, replacing the historic loose federation of state organizations with a stronger role for the national office and a national party press. The convention unanimously voted to ban all factional inner-party publications in an effort to stave the rampant factional warfare that was cannibalizing the organization.**

**Several different perspectives on the results of the 1937 Special Convention were published in the party's theoretical monthly, including articles [by Samuel Romer and Hal Siegel](#), by Max Shachtman, and by Gus Tyler.**

**20. "1938 National Convention"—Kenosha, WI—April 21 - 23, 1938.**

**A mimeographed report of the convention minutes and resolutions was published.**

**21. "1940 National Convention"—Washington, DC—April 4 - 6, 1940.**

**A mimeographed report of the convention minutes and resolutions was published.**

**22. "1942 National Convention"—Milwaukee, WI—May 30 - June 1, 1942.**

**A mimeographed report of the convention minutes and resolutions was published.**

**23. "1944 National Convention"—Reading, PA—June 2 - 4, 1944.**

**A mimeographed report of the convention minutes and resolutions was published.**

**24. "1946 National Convention"—Chicago, IL—May 31 - June 2, 1946.**

**A mimeographed report of the convention minutes and resolutions was published.**